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• (1105)

[English]

The Chair (Mr. Ali Ehsassi (Willowdale, Lib.)): I call this meeting to order.

Welcome to meeting number 79 of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development.

Today's meeting is taking place in a hybrid format, pursuant to the Standing Orders, and therefore members are attending in person in the room as well as remotely by using the Zoom application.

I'd like to make a few comments for the benefit of members and witnesses.

Before speaking, please do wait until I recognize you by name. You may speak in the official language of your choice. Interpretation services are available. Although this room is equipped with a powerful audio system, feedback events can occur. These can be extremely harmful to the interpreters and can cause serious injuries. The most common cause, I will remind members, for sound feedback is the earpiece being placed too close to a microphone.

With regard to a speaking list, the committee clerk and I will do our best to maintain a consolidated order of speaking for all members, whether they are participating virtually or in person. In accordance with the committee's routine motion concerning connection tests for witnesses, I am informing committee members that all witnesses appearing virtually have completed the required connection tests in advance of our meeting.

Pursuant to Standing Order 108(2) and the motions adopted by the committee on Wednesday, September 21, 2022, and Wednesday, January 18, 2023, the committee is resuming its study of security at the borders between Azerbaijan and Armenia.

I'd like to now welcome our witnesses.

We are very privileged and happy to have with us, from the Department of Foreign Affairs, Trade and Development, our first ambassador to Armenia, His Excellency Andrew Turner, by video conference.

In addition, in the room, we're grateful to have Robert Sinclair, senior Arctic official and director general, Arctic, Eurasian, and European Affairs.

Welcome, Mr. Ambassador. It's a great honour to have you with us here today.

For your opening remarks, you have five minutes.

The floor is yours before we turn to questions from members.

Thank you.

Mr. Andrew Turner (Ambassador of Canada to the Republic of Armenia, Department of Foreign Affairs, Trade and Development): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

It is a profound honour to speak to you as Canada's first resident ambassador to the Republic of Armenia. I'm grateful to the committee for the flexibility in allowing me to appear virtually, given that I only recently arrived in Yerevan, and there is much work to be done on the ground at such an important time.

Having begun my public service career as a parliamentary page, I commend Parliament for the opportunity this program offers to young Canadians.

Global Affairs Canada is closely monitoring the situation in Nagorno-Karabakh and remains deeply concerned by the rapid deterioration of the humanitarian conditions arising from the events of the past year, including the 10-month blockade, Azerbaijan's September 19 military operation and the mass forced displacement of Nagorno-Karabakh's population.

[Translation]

It was on September 19, 2023, that Azerbaijan launched a military operation against the separatist army in the Nagorno-Karabakh region. On September 20, Nagorno-Karabakh's de facto authorities announced their acceptance of a ceasefire proposal put forward by Russian peacekeepers and based on Azerbaijan's maximalist goals.

[English]

Following the military operation, there was a mass exodus into Armenia of ethnic Armenians who, after 30 years of conflict and the blockade of the past 10 months, feared remaining in Nagorno-Karabakh. According to UNHCR'S latest emergency update, 100,632 people have arrived in Armenia, which is nearly all of the estimated 120,000 ethnic Armenians of Nagorno-Karabakh. We commend the Government of Armenia for its effective response to this surge of refugees, over 80% of whom have now been temporarily placed within host communities across the country.

[Translation]

UN agencies have launched an appeal for \$97 million to help 231,000 people, including refugees and the host communities that support them. Initial actions focused on the refugees' most urgent needs, including shelter, but the emphasis is now on longer-term needs.

[English]

In support of these efforts, Canada has joined the international community in responding to the Government of Armenia's call for assistance. Canada announced a combined \$3.9 million in humanitarian assistance to support refugees from Nagorno-Karabakh through the ICRC, UNHCR, and other organizations.

On October 26, Prime Minister Pashinyan announced his hopes that a negotiated peace agreement and the establishment of relations with Azerbaijan could be reached within months. Earlier today, he reiterated to the National Assembly that peace and normalization with Azerbaijan and normalized relations with Turkey are his objectives.

Canada supports these goals. Canada has consistently called for a permanent cessation of hostilities and calls on all parties to meaningfully engage in dialogue to reach a comprehensive negotiated peace treaty. Canada promotes the principles of the non-use of force, territorial integrity of both countries and self-determination. A peace agreement must also now guarantee the right of the displaced population to return to Nagorno-Karabakh and guarantee respect for its property and human rights.

[Translation]

In an effort to help reach a peace agreement, various mediation initiatives have been undertaken in recent years. However, after the second Karabakh war in 2020, the efforts of the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe's Minsk Group came to an end.

Since then, several unofficial processes were launched to support peace talks between Armenia and Azerbaijan, including those led by Russia, the European Union and the United States. Most recently, on October 5, a meeting was held in Grenada between Armenia, the European Council, France and Germany. On October 23, the foreign ministers of Iran, Russia, Armenia, Azerbaijan and Turkey met in Tehran, within the 3+3 format, to discuss developments in the South Caucasus.

[English]

With the official opening by Minister Joly of the Canadian embassy in Yerevan on October 25, Canada is now better placed to engage with Armenia's government and communities and to meaningfully contribute to international efforts to support democracy, peace and stability in the region.

During her visit, Minister Joly also reiterated Canada's support to Armenia in response to this crisis; announced additional humanitarian assistance; visited the EU observer mission; met with the Armenian government, including Prime Minister Pashinyan; met with civil society; and met directly with people who were forced to flee Nagorno-Karabakh to hear their stories.

The minister was accompanied by members of opposition parties, further highlighting the broad base of support for Armenia at such a difficult time. Canada's ongoing support and the decision to open an embassy in Yerevan have been warmly welcomed by all our Armenia interlocutors and our like-minded partners.

Continuing to monitor developments with regard to Nagorno-Karabakh, Armenia-Azerbaijan relations and the broader regional situation will be an important focus for the embassy.

I and my team remain at the committee's disposal, and I will do my best to answer any questions you may have.

• (1110)

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Ambassador.

We now turn to the members for their questions. The first member is MP Abouttaif for six minutes.

Mr. Ziad Abouttaif (Edmonton Manning, CPC): Good morning, Your Excellency, and thanks for your presentation.

I think you gave us a very clear picture of what happened and the latest development there, where there were over 100,000 Armenian people who went back to Armenia for protection, more or less. Also, 80% were housed by host communities, but where are the other 20%? Are they in proper camps? What's the situation for these 20%, almost 20,000 people?

Mr. Andrew Turner: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The vast majority of people have been accommodated in housing, taken in by family and friends. The government is also engaged in efforts to find temporary accommodation, but none of this requires the use of tents or anything of that nature. Everyone is being accommodated in more permanent structures.

In some cases, these are limited—places with small rooms—but at least some shelter is being provided to keep people out of the elements as we move closer into winter weather.

Mr. Ziad Abouttaif: You mentioned the short-term and the long-term solutions to this situation. Recalling history, it could take years for this thing to settle. How do you envision the future as far as returning these people back to their homes is concerned? Who is going to guarantee these people safety and security if, at one point, they can return to their homes?

Mr. Andrew Turner: Mr. Chair, I'd say that there are two elements to this. First of all, Canada and the rest of the international community have been very clear that the right of the people to return to Nagorno-Karabakh must be respected and that they must have a free and unconstrained choice to return either permanently or to return if they wish to collect more of their property.

The Government of Armenia has indicated that it is also making every effort to accommodate all of the population who wish to remain in Armenia and is requesting support from the international community as it develops plans to take in what is a very significant number of people for a country with a small population base.

Mr. Ziad Aboultaif: Iran and Turkey are major players in the region, as well as, of course, Russia, and our relationship with Russia is not the best. Who is basically on the opposite side, if we put Iran, Turkey and Russia and their meetings and their vision toward how this is going to develop or how it's going to end? On the opposite side, which is our western world, how clear is our position, and how can we force our way through to make sure that the outcome that we all look for, which is the return of these people back to their homes, is going to happen? Who are we going to be negotiating with?

Mr. Andrew Turner: Mr. Chair, the solution to the issues between Armenia and Azerbaijan, including the fate of the displaced population, is the conclusion of the peace agreement between the two countries. This has always been at the core of the matter. It has always been Canada's policy to support these efforts.

The traditional efforts of the OSCE to serve as mediator have broken down in the wake of the Russian invasion of Ukraine and Azerbaijan's loss of confidence in the OSCE. Canada has been very active in supporting other efforts that have been launched, through both the European Union and the United States, to encourage discussion. We have also seen efforts to take part, at times, by another neighbour—Georgia.

Canada is committed to supporting whatever forum or venue would be most effective in bringing about a permanent peace agreement.

• (1115)

Mr. Ziad Aboultaif: Ambassador, the Russians were there. Their propaganda said they secured the safety of these people to exit the region towards Armenia for their own safety. As we know, that's not the true story.

There is, of course, the economic side. This region is part of a trade corridor. Can you highlight this specific aspect of it? Turkey, Russia and other players have an interest in that trade corridor and in securing it. It seems as if the people of the Karabakh region are paying the price for this.

If you could give us a background on this aspect, that would be good.

Mr. Andrew Turner: Mr. Chair, I think the committee members have all seen many examples of Russian propaganda and disinformation. I'll make it clear that we cannot take anything Moscow says at face value. Certainly, we're seeing extensive criticism of the performance—or lack thereof—of the Russian peacekeepers, from both the population of Nagorno-Karabakh and the Armenian government.

Efforts to integrate the trade corridors will remain key elements of the discussions as they go forward. In terms of reaching a peace agreement, this is one of the principles agreed to in the 2020 ceasefire. Prime Minister Pashinyan of Armenia has repeatedly indicated that this is something that can be discussed, but it also requires reciprocal treatment and for the trade corridors throughout the south Caucasus to be opened up.

Mr. Ziad Aboultaif: One thing comes to mind—

The Chair: I'm afraid you're out of time.

We'll next go to MP Oliphant. You have six minutes.

Hon. Robert Oliphant (Don Valley West, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you, Ambassador Turner.

I don't want to understate how important it is to have you coming to us from Yerevan. About a dozen or more years ago, I went to Armenia, came back and wrote a report asking the Conservative government to open an embassy in Yerevan. It has taken our government a while to do it as well. I'm glad it is finally happening. I'm glad to see you there, personally.

I also think I will mention to Erica, our former clerk, that you should meet with the pages at some point. I'm sure many of them would love to know they could be ambassadors as well, some day. It's very important.

I have a couple of questions.

The first question is on the humanitarian state in Armenia. There are 100,000 people arriving. You say they're moving from immediate shelter issues to longer-term issues.

What do you see as Canada's role in that?

Mr. Andrew Turner: The role the Armenian government is playing in accommodating these refugees is very impressive and has been singled out by everyone I have met with since I arrived, both in the international community and domestically. They've done a tremendous job of accommodating such a rapid influx of people in such a short time, particularly because there was already a pre-existing population of thousands of refugees—going back to the 2020 conflict—and because Armenia is hosting refugees from other countries, such as Syria, and from other conflicts.

The key challenges now will be moving to support for the government's efforts to integrate the population. Again, this will be moving from emergency supplies of food and shelter to expanding schools to accommodate the larger number of children, expanding medical facilities to accommodate the larger population and, perhaps most importantly, working to support efforts to expand economic opportunities and provide employment.

Prime Minister Pashinyan has signalled that he views this as an opportunity to integrate the population, but a lot of work needs to be done, so the expertise and support of partners and allies, including Canada, is something the Armenian government is actively pursuing.

• (1120)

Hon. Robert Oliphant: Thank you.

I note your comments that Prime Minister Pashinyan has stated that he's hoping for peace and normalized relationships with both Azerbaijan and Turkey. Do you think this is a genuine possibility that can happen? Will those three partners move towards normalized relations in my lifetime?

Mr. Andrew Turner: I certainly think so. As a diplomat, I'm naturally optimistic about the possibilities for diplomacy to avoid conflict, particularly when we see the tragic results when it is unsuccessful. There have been statements from all of the parties involved that they are committed to seeking a peace agreement. The benefits of such an agreement would flow to all of the countries in the region, as well as, more broadly, to seeing the south Caucasus able to function as an integrated economic unit. Really, the only disadvantage would be to Russia, which has been able to kind of play them off against each other to its own benefit.

Again, it is in everyone's best interest. There are, at least, clear statements of intent. The trick will be to try to make sure that those statements are followed up on. Certainly Canada, through the embassy here or through other engagements with Baku and with Ankara, is doing everything it can to encourage that.

Hon. Robert Oliphant: Thank you.

Stéphane Dion, as our special envoy, went to Armenia and came back with a very lengthy and, I think, quite important report, including the recommendation that we open an embassy.

Is it part of your work plan to take that report and find ways to actualize it?

Mr. Andrew Turner: Yes, it absolutely is. I have already been in touch with Ambassador Dion, who remains very much involved and committed to seeing that there is follow-up on his report. I am pleased to say that we've already been able to act on several of the recommendations, perhaps most importantly the opening of the embassy and also the initial round of consultations between Canada and Armenia that we held last year.

In terms of engagement with civil society, we have been able to approximately double the funding for the Arnold Chan initiative for democracy under the Canada fund for local initiatives since its inception back in 2018. We're now at about \$230,000 and are now funding up to six projects. We're not yet at the stage of the 10 to 15 projects that Ambassador Dion recommended, but we have made significant progress in that direction. Now I and the embassy team on the ground very much intend to engage further on advancing the other recommendations as well.

Hon. Robert Oliphant: Thank you.

I just have a few seconds to close.

Thank you for your work. I think it's the right person in the right place at the right time. I think that your regional impact can be as important as the direct impact in Armenia. We needed to have a true voice in Yerevan. Moscow is not an easy place to get intelligence. I'm glad to have an intelligent person getting intelligence.

Thank you, Ambassador.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We now go to MP Bergeron. You have six minutes.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron (Montarville, BQ): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I would begin by echoing the words of my colleague Mr. Oliphant, who spoke not only of the importance of having representation and having you present in Yerevan, Your Excellency, but also of the significance of opening a Canadian embassy in Yerevan. In my opinion, it has taken far too long for this to happen, but the embassy is finally open, and I'm very happy about that. I congratulate the government on finally going ahead and opening this embassy.

Your Excellency, I'm very happy to see you again. We've previously spent some time together, but it was only this morning that I learned you'd been a page in the House of Commons. I hesitate to ask if you were a page when I first became an MP.

Mr. Sinclair, thank you so much for being with us as well.

In December 2022, in violation of the ceasefire agreement reached after the 2020 war, Azerbaijan allowed, indeed organized, the blockade of the Latchine corridor, leading to famine among the Nagorno-Karabakh population. The unstated aim of this blockade was to rid Nagorno-Karabakh of its population.

Presumably considering that things weren't proceeding quickly enough, Azerbaijan decided to act, on September 19, by invading Nagorno-Karabakh, triggering an exodus of its population: over 100,000 inhabitants of Nagorno-Karabakh fled to Armenia. This led Canada's Ambassador and Permanent Representative to the United Nations, Mr. Bob Rae, to describe the situation as "a complete failure of global diplomacy in the face of ethnic cleansing."

I imagine the international community cannot remain indifferent and inactive in the face of an ethnic cleansing operation recognized as such by our permanent representative to the United Nations.

At a press conference, Minister Mélanie Joly, accompanied by her Armenian counterpart, explained that all options were on the table when it came to Azerbaijan.

What are those options, Your Excellency? Do they include possible sanctions?

• (1125)

Mr. Andrew Turner: Yes. During her visit here in Armenia last week, Minister Joly repeated directly, in response to the specific question about the possibility of sanctions, that all options were indeed still under consideration.

That is still a measure we use, if warranted. We prefer not to resort to it and resolve the problem through diplomacy instead. It is, however, an important mechanism at our disposal and one that we have used in a number of cases, perhaps starker ones, for example in response to Russia's invasion of Ukraine. So it is certainly one of the options.

In addition, we have made arrangements for Canada to be the first country outside the European Union to participate in the observation mission to ensure that we have information coming directly from the border. We are also working with all our allies and partners to ensure that messages stressing the importance of respecting sovereignty and territorial integrity and not resorting to the use of military forces reach Baku directly, as well as Ankara, which, of course, has a great deal of influence over Azerbaijan.

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron: Thank you, Your Excellency, for reminding us of our reasons for imposing sanctions on Russia following the invasion of Ukraine.

That said, you are not unaware that in 2020, and again more recently, over the past few months, Azerbaijan has invaded patches of Armenia's sovereign territory. In fact, it still occupies said territory. So not only has Azerbaijan attacked the autonomous territory of Nagorno-Karabakh, which lies within its own territory, it has also invaded parts of Armenia's territory. I think this requires action on the part of the international community, especially in the face of what Ambassador Bob Rae has acknowledged is ethnic cleansing. We have a duty to act.

Your Excellency, you are doubtless very hopeful that a peace agreement will be reached between Armenia and Azerbaijan, and between Armenia and Turkey. I'd like to share your hope and optimism. In the meantime, in the event of a peace agreement, how do we ensure that Azerbaijani families don't move into Armenian homes in Nagorno-Karabakh? Otherwise, we'll end up with a situation that's frozen or set in stone and won't allow for the eventual return of families to Nagorno-Karabakh.

That was my first question.

Secondly, what guarantee do we have, on Azerbaijan's part, that Nagorno-Karabakh's centuries-old cultural assets will be protected?

• (1130)

[English]

The Chair: Mr. Bergeron, you're out of time.

Ambassador Turner, if you could respond very briefly to the two questions in 30 seconds, we'd be grateful.

[Translation]

Mr. Andrew Turner: Given the over 30 years of conflict, a great deal of information is unclear as to the precise borders between the two countries. This is one of the reasons for wanting to reach a permanent peace agreement. That would settle all these issues, including the protection of homes as well as cultural property and sites.

Canada supports these efforts both through negotiations and in such forums as UNESCO.

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron: Thank you.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you.

Next we go to MP McPherson. You have six minutes, and the floor is yours.

Ms. Heather McPherson (Edmonton Strathcona, NDP): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Thank you very much, Your Excellency, for being here today. It's very important that we get this testimony from you, and it's exciting to know that you are there on the ground and that the embassy is open.

My colleague Mr. Bergeron asked about sanctions, and I have a very similar question for you.

On September 22, I wrote to Minister Joly, the Minister of Foreign Affairs, asking for an immediate imposition of targeted sanctions on Azerbaijani individuals and entities that have been responsible for violations of international law and human rights abuses. I haven't heard back from her.

I'm curious. You say sanctions are on the table. You said to my colleague that sanctions are something that the government is considering. Knowing what happened just over a month ago, at what point would Canada seriously consider them as being one of the tools they would use?

Mr. Andrew Turner: The minister has been very clear that sanctions are.... Again, all options are on the table, and they are being considered. The issue in terms of imposing sanctions is that Canada tends to find it most effective to impose sanctions in partnership with our like-minded allies. There need to be discussions to see where our allies are in regard to this.

Again, as recently as earlier today, the Prime Minister of Armenia reiterated that there are currently ongoing active discussions to move forward with a peace process with Azerbaijan, and so there is also a question of whether this would be the appropriate time for sanctions with such discussions ongoing. This is an issue that's being debated within Armenia. We saw that happening even during the discussions when the minister was here. This was one of many questions on which the exact timing is being debated.

Ms. Heather McPherson: Yes. However, we did see the Azerbaijani launch an offensive. On September 19, over 200 people were killed. There was, as we've said, the mass displacement of over 100,000 ethnic Armenians.

It seems as though those discussions that Canada should be having with its like-minded partners should have already started. Have those discussions not been happening? It does seem difficult that there is a peace process happening after 100,000 Armenians have had to flee their homes.

I guess my question is whether the sanctions discussions have been happening with our like-minded allies. How confident are you that Azerbaijan is coming to this peace process in good faith?

Mr. Andrew Turner: Mr. Chair, there absolutely have been discussions with our like-minded allies. As I've indicated, there is simply continued debate about when it would be most appropriate to use that sanctions tool.

In terms of the impact of the displacement, Canada has been very clear in condemning Azerbaijan's blockade, in calling for the re-opening of the corridor and in condemning the military action on the 19th. Canada has been making it absolutely clear that the right of the displaced population to return to their homes must be absolutely respected.

Ms. Heather McPherson: Obviously we would want justice to be applied for the crimes that have been committed. We would want to use the international tools we have at our disposal.

Has Canada had any conversations about that? Would Canada be calling for international legal mechanisms to be used at this time?

• (1135)

Mr. Andrew Turner: Canada has certainly been engaged in discussions. As with sanctions, though, this is also an issue on which we are seeing some debate within Armenia as to when the most appropriate time to engage in that type of activity would be.

As long as there is a sense from the government that the peace process is something that can be pursued, we would not want to do anything that would disrupt those efforts.

Ms. Heather McPherson: Thank you.

I think you mentioned that since September 28, Canada has committed \$3.9 million for humanitarian assistance funding in response to this crisis.

We know that the funding has been allocated to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and the International Committee of the Red Cross. Can you tell me how much of that funding has been delivered and how exactly this funding is being used?

Mr. Andrew Turner: Mr. Chair, I'm not certain how much has been delivered yet. We can follow up to confirm that.

Again, Canada's traditional model is to provide it directly to the agency—in this case, the UNHCR and ICRC—and allow them to use it as they determine is most required to respond to the needs on the ground.

Ms. Heather McPherson: It would be great if you could possibly give us the amount that has been delivered to date. That would be helpful. Thank you.

For my final question, I just want to get a little bit of clarity on some of the comments that we've heard from Minister Joly. She said, "Canada supports a negotiated political solution to the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict as well as the continuation of dialogue between the parties towards promoting confidence-building measures".

From your perspective and from Canada's perspective, what type of negotiated settlement would be necessary for ensuring peace between Armenia and Azerbaijan?

Mr. Andrew Turner: The exact provisions would obviously need to be resolved between the two states.

However, the broad issues that are being looked at are some of the key principles that have been outlined for decades, in some cases, but certainly have been reiterated in recent statements, including in Granada. These are about mutual recognition of each other's sovereignty and territorial integrity, self-determination and the non-use of force.

Part of the process would clearly need to be agreements on a process for delimiting the border between the two countries as well as resolving the resulting territorial disputes around the exact nature of where the border is.

There would likewise need to be efforts to come up with a mechanism to address claims of compensation for the losses suffered by victims, most likely going back all the way to the 1990s conflicts, up until and including what we have seen in recent weeks.

Ms. Heather McPherson: Thank you very much.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Ambassador.

We next go to MP Chong. You have five minutes.

Hon. Michael Chong (Wellington—Halton Hills, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Ambassador Turner, I am wondering if you could tell us what you know of the status of the 20,000-some ethnic Armenians that were left behind in Nagorno-Karabakh.

Mr. Andrew Turner: According to the reports from the UN mission that was allowed to enter the territory—for the first time in a couple of decades—as well as humanitarian organizations, the reports are that virtually all of the ethnic Armenian population has left.

Again, the UN reported at one point finding no more than 50 people. The largest estimates I have seen are still under 100 people. The vast majority, and effectively the totality of the population, are believed now to have crossed into Armenia.

Hon. Michael Chong: Okay. Thank you. I appreciate that clarification.

When you refer to "80%" of people, you're referring to 80% of those 120,000 that are being housed in Armenia proper.

Mr. Andrew Turner: Yes. The vast majority of the population are being housed in Armenia.

There are estimates of a few thousand that have left Armenia to go elsewhere—Russia or other countries—where they would have familial ties and rights of residence, but the Government of Armenia has been very clear that their goal is to ensure that everyone who wishes to has the ability to return to Nagorno-Karabakh, and anyone who does not choose to exercise that right, would have opportunities to remain in Armenia proper.

• (1140)

Hon. Michael Chong: Just to clarify, where are the majority of the 120,000 ethnic Armenians from Nagorno-Karabakh? About 100,000 are being housed in Armenia. Several thousand are abroad. Where are the balance?

Mr. Andrew Turner: Again, the balance are believed to be in Armenia and are in the process of being housed. It's simply a matter of some of the estimates and figures being updated as the UN gets more information from the government.

Hon. Michael Chong: The so-called president of Nagorno-Karabakh's de facto government signed a decree in late September or early October dissolving all of the institutions of that separatist government. Does that signal that the 120,000 ethnic Armenians have no intention of returning to Nagorno-Karabakh?

Mr. Andrew Turner: From the discussions that we had directly with some of the refugees during Minister Joly's visit, there would be a strong desire from people to return if they felt that they could do so in safety.

At the current time, given everything that has gone on, they are not convinced that will be possible; however, as such, the majority of people are working on the expectation of staying in Armenia rather than being able to return in the near future.

Hon. Michael Chong: Sure—understood.

Both Armenia and Azerbaijan have indicated in recent weeks and recent months a great deal of optimism about a negotiated peace treaty between Armenia and Azerbaijan.

Maybe you could talk a bit about how important that is, and how much of a barrier that a negotiated peace treaty will face in light of the right of return of the 120,000 ethnic Armenians.

Mr. Andrew Turner: Mr. Chair, thus far there has not been any indication or statement from Azerbaijan that they would be opposed to the right of return. They have set up mechanisms by which the population can register to receive services under the Government of Azerbaijan. The issue is much more likely to be the lack of trust and fear for safety that has built up over the last several decades of hostility and the most recent events as well.

There is also the question of displaced populations from the 1990s conflicts of Azerbaijan. This will also be very much part of the issues that will need to be resolved in a peace agreement.

Hon. Michael Chong: I have a very quick final question.

For the 120,000 ethnic Armenians in the Republic of Armenia, what is their citizenship status vis-à-vis the Republic of Armenia? Are they considered Armenian citizens as well as Azerbaijani citizens?

Mr. Andrew Turner: According to discussions I had with the UNHCR last week, the documents that the residents in Nagorno-Karabakh possess would not automatically confer citizenship for Armenia. Therefore, they have emphasized that technically, they would be considered refugees, although many have close family ties.

They are encouraging the Government of Armenia to ensure that they are given a rapid process to become full citizens. This is largely a matter of technicality, given the close ties that exist between the communities, but the UNHCR has specified that some work will need to be done to naturalize them as Armenians.

Hon. Michael Chong: Is that an indication, Ambassador, that this may—

The Chair: Mr. Chong, you are out of time.

Hon. Michael Chong: Could I just—

The Chair: You're considerably out of time.

Next we go to Mr. Zuberi. You have five minutes.

Mr. Sameer Zuberi (Pierrefonds—Dollard, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you, Mr. Turner, for being here today.

I would like to pick up on a theme that has been brought up in the testimony so far around sanctions. This is an important tool that we use to promote peace and security around the world, as I'm sure you're very well aware.

With respect to sanctions and this particular conflict, has Armenia asked allies to apply sanctions to Azerbaijan at this point in time?

• (1145)

Mr. Andrew Turner: No. As I said, there seems to be considerable debate within Armenia as to whether or not sanctions should be applied at this time.

We have certainly seen calls for support and for action, but there are debates taking place on a range of questions, including sanctions, CSTO membership and accountability processes. We're seeing debates within Armenia about what mechanisms could be usefully pursued and what the best timing is to do so.

There is a strong sense that the major emphasis should be on reaching a negotiated peace agreement.

Mr. Sameer Zuberi: It makes sense that we would wait for Armenia to take the lead, given that it is directly impacted. Armenians and Azeris are directly involved, so we have to consider how these two actors are conducting themselves before we get involved.

I'm sure you're very well aware of what's happening, given your presence in Armenia. You alluded to this, but in terms of sanctions as a tool to promote peace, can you tell us how that would play out—the question of sanctions—in this particular instance, and on the path to peace?

Mr. Andrew Turner: The pursuit of sanctions right now would risk disrupting the ongoing efforts at peace. While we have not seen anyone take the route of sanctions, we have seen some announcements from France, for example, about the possibility of military support, which have caused Azerbaijan to withdraw from planned international meetings and discussions that could have helped to advance the peace process. Whether that would have happened or not, we don't know, but it certainly provided an excuse that could be used.

Again, that type of activity—the imposition of sanctions—could risk providing excuses for some parties to the conflict to stall further on peace talks, which is obviously counterproductive.

Mr. Sameer Zuberi: That's really helpful, because it helps us reach our ultimate objective, which is peace. Sanctions are a very important and critical tool, which you must use at the appropriate time. However, to your point around peace, it is clearly our objective to help people in Armenia and the region.

With respect to the right of return, it was discussed earlier and it is a very important concept. In my understanding, the Government of Canada has called for Armenians to have the full right of return to the region of Nagorno-Karabakh. We also know, as you said, that there are close ties.

If Armenians from the region choose not to return, with respect to collecting belongings, having full access to their assets and being able to have those assets respected in terms of their monetary value, can you comment on that second point? We obviously call for the full respect of the right of return, but if ethnic Armenians choose another path, can you elaborate a bit further on that second point of how they can get their rights if they choose an alternative path?

Mr. Andrew Turner: Canada has been very clear that we have called, as have our like-minded allies, for the full right of return without any limitations, and that would include the right of Armenians to return for a short period to collect belongings, to take care of property and to do whatever they choose to do. Again, these are their homes. These are their belongings. They have the right to do with them as they wish, and that right cannot be infringed in any way. Whether it's a permanent right of return to live there or simply a short-term right to dispense with property or to collect personal belongings, that right must be respected.

• (1150)

The Chair: Thank you.

We will now go to Mr. Bergeron for two and a half minutes.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Your Excellency, I believe you used the word "pretext" to justify Azerbaijan's decision to withdraw from a meeting to negotiate a peace treaty. I think that should make us question whether Azerbaijan is truly willing to achieve lasting peace in the region.

Also, I find it somewhat peculiar that France is being singled out in this way, as it has been Armenia's only true supporter in recent months, raising the issue at the UN Security Council, establishing a diplomatic mission in what would be the corridor between Azerbaijan and Nakhchivan, and then offering Armenia weapons, so as to restore a certain balance and deter any further intervention on the part of Azerbaijan, which might be encouraged by its latest military successes. The latter, may I remind you, were made possible by Canadian technology used in the Bayraktar drones that Turkey supplied to Azerbaijan without even informing Canada.

I shall digress no longer and return to the political position of the current Armenian government.

Your Excellency, as you know, Prime Minister Nikol Pachinian's government is under enormous pressure. In response to my colleague Mr. Aboultaif, you spoke of disinformation. I think there are a considerable number of disinformation campaigns aimed at destabilizing Prime Minister Pachinian's government.

Can you comment on that?

Mr. Andrew Turner: None of my comments were intended to criticize France. It was merely an example. Azerbaijan has also tried to criticize the European Union mission, saying that Canada's possible participation would make it a kind of NATO mission. So, we will indeed need to have an opportunity to observe the actions of the government in Baku and ascertain whether it is serious about negotiating a peace agreement.

In response to the question, I have to say that we're seeing a great deal of disinformation targeting Nikol Pachinian's government, that much is certain. The creation of a true democracy in a territory so close to Russia, in a territory belonging to a former member of the Soviet Union, is a nightmare for Russia. In fact, this is among the reasons underlying Russia's military operations against Ukraine and, before that, against Georgia.

So, it's incredibly important that Armenia have the opportunity to continue developing its democratic system. That was partly the basis of Special Envoy Mr. Dion's report, and it's certainly something that the Canadian embassy and government will be pursuing.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you.

We'll now go to MP McPherson for two and a half minutes. This is the last question.

Ms. Heather McPherson: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Again thank you, Ambassador, for being here today.

Ambassador, on social media Bob Rae, Canada's ambassador and permanent representative to the United Nations in New York, described the situation in Nagorno-Karabakh as a complete failure of global diplomacy in the face of ethnic cleansing. Does the Government of Canada believe that ethnic cleansing has been carried out in the Nagorno-Karabakh region?

Mr. Andrew Turner: My colleagues from our international law bureau would be quick to state that there is no precise definition of ethnic cleansing under international law, although it can constitute an element or an aspect of crimes against humanity or war crimes. Such a determination would need to be made by an authorized legal body, given that there are very precise definitions for those crimes.

What is crystal clear, though, is that we have seen the 10-month blockade and the use of military force, and we have seen the population forced to flee because of their legitimate fear for their lives and security. Therefore, it is absolutely imperative that their right to return and their right to enjoy their property be respected.

• (1155)

Ms. Heather McPherson: Of course, and that's to return in a safe manner.

Mr. Andrew Turner: Indeed, yes.

Ms. Heather McPherson: I also have a question about the opposition parties in Armenia, and I'd like to get your perspective.

We know that the complete takeover of Nagorno-Karabakh in September sparked large demonstrations in Armenia's capital. Some protesters were calling on the Armenian Prime Minister to resign because of his perceived failures.

Can you talk a little bit about how the opposition parties are reacting to the events of September?

Mr. Andrew Turner: The opposition has indeed been very critical of Prime Minister Pashinyan for several years. Again, it's been very critical going back to the 2020 conflict.

However, the government was not only successfully re-elected in 2021 on the basis of its commitment to democracy and reform, but it is also generally perceived as having done very well in responding to the humanitarian crisis in providing shelter. As a result, we're not yet seeing sustained mass demonstrations.

There were protests in the initial aftermath, but they have not yet been sustained to a significant degree. While there continues to be opposition, it is being expressed through debate in Parliament rather than through large street demonstrations.

Ms. Heather McPherson: Thank you very much, Your Excellency.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

At this point, it now being one minute before noon, I will thank Ambassador Turner for having made himself available to us. I'd also like to thank Mr. Sinclair. We're very grateful for your time and your expertise.

We will suspend for approximately five minutes to allow the second roster of panellists to appear before us.

Go ahead, Mr. Bergeron.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron: I just have one question, Chair.

Were His Excellency and Global Affairs Canada officials offered the opportunity to appear for the full Committee meeting, which was two hours, and did they express any reservations about that?

[*English*]

The Chair: Yes, Mr. Bergeron. As the members previously indicated, for the next panel we are hearing from four different witnesses.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron: That wasn't my question, Chair.

I wanted to know if His Excellency and Global Affairs Canada officials were offered the opportunity to appear during the entire two-hour Committee meeting, and whether they expressed any reservations in this regard.

[*English*]

The Chair: No, Mr. Bergeron. If you recall, when this matter was discussed with all of the members, it was agreed that for the first hour we would have the ambassador and for the following hour we would hear from various experts. Initially, when the clerk reached out, she asked for an hour.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron: Thank you, Chair.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you.

We will suspend for approximately four to five minutes.

• (1155)

(Pause)

• (1200)

The Chair: Welcome back, everyone. We will now resume our meeting on the study of security at the borders between Azerbaijan and Armenia.

I would like to welcome four witnesses, two of whom are here with us and two of whom are joining us virtually.

First we have Professor Jean-François Ratelle, from the University of Ottawa. We also have Professor Jeff Sahadeo, from Carleton University. We have Professor Christopher Waters, faculty of law, University of Windsor, and finally we have Ms. Olesya Vartanyan joining us today as a senior south Caucasus analyst.

Each of you will be provided with five minutes for opening remarks; however, given that we are hearing from four witnesses, timelines are going to be very short.

That said, we will first go to Professor Ratelle, who has the floor for five minutes.

• (1205)

Dr. Jean-François Ratelle (University of Ottawa, As an Individual): In September of 2023, Azerbaijan launched a new military offensive to retake the breakaway region of Nagorno-Karabakh. Although in violation of the 2020 ceasefire, the operation was designed to take over the region while Russia remained bogged down in Ukraine and mainly uninterested in fulfilling its mandate as a peace guarantor. After a swift Azerbaijani military victory over Armenian separatists, 120,000 ethnic Armenians fled, fearing for their lives.

The scale and swiftness of this potential ethnic cleansing is reminiscent of what happened in the former Yugoslavia in the 1990s. Rather than being driven by mass murder, the situation is the result of years of mistrust and fear between the two ethnic communities and the Azerbaijani government. Some cases of potential war crimes, including extrajudicial killings and the destruction of heritage sites and civilian properties, were documented during the 2023 military operation. The ethnic cleansing was mostly the result of a horrible choice that ethnic Armenians had to make in the chaos of Azerbaijan's military operation—meaning surviving in Armenia or leaving their ancestral homelands.

Although the Azerbaijan government guaranteed the safe return of Armenians to Nagorno-Karabakh as Azeri citizens, coming back to the antebellum status quo appears almost impossible.

First, as ethnic minorities, they fear potential violence and ethnic hatred from security forces as well as from newly relocated local citizens of Azerbaijan. Years of ethnic tensions in the region have now drastically transformed the relationships between Azeris and Armenians.

Second, Azerbaijan remains far from a functional liberal democracy, adopting a very repressive approach against opposition forces and journalists in general. The rule of law that in theory could support the protection of Armenians remains institutionally weak, even maybe non-existent.

Furthermore, the Aliyev government has proven unwilling to protect Armenians in the last few years and before. Before the 2023 military operation to retake Nagorno-Karabakh, the Azerbaijani government imposed a blockade of the Lachin corridor, the only road to reach the Armenian enclave after the 2020 ceasefire. The region suffered a de facto blockade, starving the Armenian population and denying them the right to survive in Karabakh for several months.

The lack of international reaction and involvement after the 2020 war and the more recent 2023 military operation has emboldened the Azeri government. Rather than looking for peace, there is fear of an extension of the military conflict to Armenia, most likely in southern Armenia in the province of Syunik. The military occupation of the Zangezur corridor would create a land bridge between the newly controlled Nagorno-Karabakh and Nakhchivan.

When we're discussing peace processes in the region, we're discussing the risk of escalation that would involve a war of conquest and a war of aggression on the side of Azerbaijan, as well as a potential alliance between Ankara and Baku.

I have policy recommendations for the government.

The Government of Canada should support Armenia's ratification of their own statute. That would help to protect Armenian minorities and investigate what happened in Nagorno-Karabakh.

The role of the ICC, the International Criminal Court, would be to prosecute criminal actions that happened in Nagorno-Karabakh. That would be similar to the case we have witnessed of Bangladesh and Myanmar in recent last years. This means that although Armenia and Azerbaijan are not part of the International Criminal Court and have not ratified the ICC, the status of refugees in Armenia could fall under the ICC jurisdiction if Armenia ratified their own statute in the upcoming year. That would lead to a potential referral of the case of the ethnic cleansing in Nagorno-Karabakh to the ICC, if Azerbaijan is unwilling or unable to prosecute the crimes committed.

We have already discussed imposing potential sanctions on Azerbaijan if the country violates Armenia's territorial integrity in the south or impedes the return of the Armenian population.

• (1210)

Finally, it appears critical that Canada ensure the protection of historical sites, national symbols and religious sites, including monasteries and villages, that are currently being destroyed in Azerbaijan by local actors as well as by Azerbaijani forces.

Thank you very much.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Professor Ratelle.

We next go to Professor Sahadeo. You have five minutes.

Mr. Jeff Sahadeo (Professor, As an Individual): Thank you very much for the invitation to speak. I will say that the situation in

the south Caucasus is extremely fluid and unpredictable, and much is going to depend on what the stronger powers in the region do—these being Russia and Iran, but primarily Turkey—and how they see their interests being served by relationships between Armenia and Azerbaijan.

Western countries, I think, lack sustained interest in pursuing a durable solution for the region, and to the extent that they have an interest in the south Caucasus right now, it's primarily in Azerbaijani gas supplies. Azerbaijan supplies about 3.5% of the gas for the European Union—not a huge amount, but certainly enough—and much more in certain countries in eastern Europe, and we haven't seen calls for sanctions. We haven't seen sustained action by the European Union to support Armenia, with the exception of France, but any arms supplies that France will give will take years to get to Armenia.

The opening of Canada's embassy in Yerevan is welcome, as many Armenians hold positive feelings about the west. It can allow us to play a humanitarian role on the ground. One thing I think we need to focus on in the near future, however, and one opportunity that Armenia has right now, is to start to build sustainable democracy, to build a state that has active NGOs, that supports the rule of law, and that has an independent judiciary, LGBTQ rights and women's rights. I think those are roles the embassy can play.

I will agree, as the ambassador said, that the Armenian government has done an excellent job of taking in 100,000 or so refugees. For a country with a population of three million, this is not an insignificant addition, but also there are many villages in Armenia that are depopulated now. Young people have left for Russia or the west and people have died in the war, especially in 2020, and Armenia needs our economic support and our support to build a sustainable state above and beyond what happens in Karabakh and in the south.

As Professor Ratelle signalled, though, this question of what Azerbaijan will do with Turkey's support is open. There have been calls within Azerbaijan. As well, many Azerbaijani nationalists are now talking about Armenia as western Azerbaijan, and the interests of the Zangezur corridor that Professor Ratelle discussed are very alive to allowing Turkey and Azerbaijan to have a land bridge towards each other, and to have a bridge from the Black Sea to the Caspian Sea, which would intensify Turkey's strategic position in regional trade, potentially bringing it as a broker into the belt and road initiative with China. Therefore, Turkey has substantial interests in the region that really outweigh the interests of most other regional powers.

Armenia, unfortunately but understandably, put its security eggs in Russia's basket, and since Russia's interests in the region have waned—and they will certainly continue to wane with what it has to deal with in Ukraine right now—we can't rely on Russia to be active in the region. In some ways, that could be a good thing, obviously, but it has backed away from its commitments under the Collective Security Treaty Organization.

Prime Minister Pashinyan, I believe, will remain in power. There were hints that there might be some kind of pro-Russian force organizing some kind of alternative government. Most Armenian governments didn't think they would survive a loss from Nagorno-Karabakh, but the alternatives now, both for Armenian opposition and for Armenia geopolitically, are very limited.

Prime Minister Pashinyan has offered a peace plan based on territorial integrity and based on the opening of communication links, and he is optimistic that the peace plan will satisfy Azerbaijan and Turkey if they're allowed communication links and transport links through the southern corridor, but as we heard, Azerbaijan has backed away from international peace talks. I think it's quite clear that they have their eyes on the Zangezur corridor and potentially southern Armenia, with Turkey's assistance.

Therefore, I think that for us the main geopolitical goal will be to work with Turkey and to decide that they should be a partner in peace instead of supporting Azerbaijan's invasion of southern Armenia. As well, we should work with the Armenian government to support democracy to integrate these refugees.

• (1215)

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Professor Sahadeo.

We will now go to Professor Waters.

Welcome back, Professor Waters. The floor is yours. You have five minutes for your opening remarks.

Dr. Christopher Waters (Professor, Faculty of Law, University of Windsor, As an Individual): Good afternoon.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Canada is to be commended for opening its full embassy in Armenia, and I wish Ambassador Turner every success in his endeavours.

Canada has stepped up in several other ways to support what special envoy Dion properly termed a “fragile democracy”. These included participating in the EU monitoring mission, a very recent visit from Minister Joly last week and the provision of humanitarian assistance for refugees, as discussed.

I also want to thank this committee for its sustained attention to the conflict. While the world's eyes are turned to the dire humanitarian situation in the Middle East, it is important that attention to this and other conflicts where Canada can shine a light and exercise leadership be sustained.

Minister Joly has said on at least a couple of occasions that everything is on the table with respect to the conflict. My message to you, Mr. Chair and your colleagues, is that now is the time for targeted sanctions to be imposed on Azerbaijan. I will give three reasons.

The first is that the ethnic cleansing of Armenians from Nagorno-Karabakh through blockade should not go unchecked. The scenes this fall of Armenians fleeing Nagorno-Karabakh, leaving behind homes, farms, towns, centuries-old churches and other symbols of cultural heritage were heartbreaking.

Sanctions would not merely be a way of expressing our dismay or of being punitive; they would be a warning that Canada expects Azerbaijan to protect cultural heritage, to safeguard the few remaining ethnic Armenians, to preserve the possibility of a right to return for those who fled, to ensure fair treatment for civilian leaders who have been detained by the regime under the guise that they are terrorists and to take peace talks seriously.

The second reason that I suggest that targeted sanctions are due and due now is that Azerbaijan has violated and continues to violate the internationally recognized borders of Armenia. It's difficult to know precisely how much Armenian territory is under control. One Armenian military estimate is that it's 19,000 acres. I don't know; I'm not on the ground. The EU monitoring mission would presumably have that information, but it's clear that Azerbaijan is in occupation of some parts of sovereign Armenia, including strategic high ground in the south and east. It's clear that the border is regularly tested with force.

What's more, the authoritarian president of Azerbaijan, Ilham Aliyev, has made his territorial ambitions clear. He has referred to Armenia as western Azerbaijan and has called for the creation of a so-called Zangezur corridor across sovereign Armenian territory. This corridor is a “historical necessity”, he said last January, adding that it will be created whether Armenia wants it or not.

Third, despite peace initiatives, the Aliyev regime simply cannot be trusted to do the right thing. This is evidenced by its breach of the trilateral ceasefire agreement of 2020 and its breach of the International Court of Justice's provisional order of February 22 of this year when it ordered Azerbaijan to allow free passage through the Lachin corridor.

These breaches of international commitments are set in the background of an authoritarian regime. As Human Rights Watch put it, “The Azerbaijani government remains hostile to dissenting voices”. The breaches also take place in the context of Armenophobia. Further, as the Lemkin Institute for Genocide Prevention describes it, genocidal Armenophobia is a state ideology in Azerbaijan and is perpetuated through the education system and military training. Armenians have been referred to by Aliyev and top state officials as “rats”, “dogs”, “wild beasts” and “jackals”, and these labels have been reflected in grotesque physical representations of Armenians, including at Central Park in Baku.

In closing, now is the time for sanctions. Targeted sanctions could mark Canada's concerns in a tangible way and help press Azerbaijan into a peace agreement, which we all want. Left unchecked, Azerbaijan has proven that it will act in a more emboldened way rather than look for peace.

Finally, the Canadian angle to the Karabakh war of 2020 should mean that we are hyper-alert to the situation. Canadian-made sensors, which this committee well knows can shine a light, had been used on Azerbaijani drones transferred by Turkey to its client state to great effect in that conflict.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

• (1220)

The Chair: Thank you very much, Professor Waters.

We will go next to Madame Vartanyan.

Welcome back. You have five minutes for your opening remarks.

Ms. Olesya Vartanyan (Senior South Caucasus Analyst, International Crisis Group): Good afternoon, Chairman, Vice-Chairs Bergeron and Chong, and distinguished members of the committee.

I am deeply honoured to have this opportunity to address you once again. When we met in January, the primary topic of our discussion was the blockade of Nagorno-Karabakh. At that time, I shared with you the concerns that my organization, the International Crisis Group, had about the escalating tensions and general instability in the region. Unfortunately, much of our analysis has proven to be accurate. In September, we witnessed a one-day military operation by Azerbaijan that prompted an exodus of almost the entire ethnic Armenian population of Nagorno-Karabakh and brought an end to 30 years of de facto self-governance in the enclave.

I am currently in Armenia, meeting regularly with the people displaced from the enclave. Many left the Nagorno-Karabakh in haste and did not bring any belongings with them. The Armenian government has been distributing cash and providing assistance with accommodation where possible. However, much more needs to be done ahead of the winter to ensure people are properly sheltered. Canada was one of the first foreign states to announce its financial donation to Armenia, and there will be an ongoing need for support in the months ahead.

In my meetings with displaced people scattered throughout Armenia, I have not met a single person who is considering returning to Nagorno-Karabakh anytime soon. They deeply miss their homes, especially in the face of the many everyday challenges they now encounter, but in the wake of Azerbaijan's military offensive and three decades of conflict before that, they have no trust in Baku's rule and are too afraid to return. They are also not ready to trust the Russian peacekeepers after what some have described to me as a failure to respond to months of tensions, multiple attacks, the blockade and the recent war.

How to encourage Armenians from Nagorno-Karabakh to consider returning remains an open question. Some foreign states have suggested sending a multinational mission responsible for monitoring the situation on the ground, which could be an option. Despite considerable pressure from western states, we have not seen any sign that Azerbaijan is ready to consider this proposal.

A starting point could be confidence-building measures to rebuild trust, such as Azerbaijan allowing people the opportunity to visit their homes and the graves of their family members. This process could start even now, possibly with the support of the Interna-

tional Committee of the Red Cross organization and the UN agencies present in the region. This could also facilitate visits by those who left Nagorno-Karabakh without any belongings or who left their documents and savings there.

Still, the biggest priority is resuming peace talks between Armenia and Azerbaijan. The fall of Nagorno-Karabakh did not automatically resolve all the problems between these two south Caucasus neighbours. Armenia and Azerbaijan have never established diplomatic ties, they do not engage in trade, and their citizens cannot freely visit each other. Their shared borders are lined with kilometres of military positions, and their border skirmishes have resulted in more casualties in the past three years than fighting in Nagorno-Karabakh itself.

Talks over the past year have encompassed various critical topics, including border demarcations and Baku's aspiration to open a special route through southern Armenia to its exclave bordering Turkey. Both are potential flashpoints left to fester.

The United States and the European Union are the primary actors who can revive the talks. Over a year ago, western mediation took centre stage in diplomacy when Russia became too embroiled in the war in Ukraine and could no longer allocate the political and military resources required to serve as a key foreign mediator. This has been a challenging process, but it marked the first time in over two decades that Armenia and Azerbaijan were meeting more frequently, with real progress in their substantial discussions.

In conclusion, I would like to commend Canada for becoming the first non-EU country to send its representatives to join the EU mission to Armenia. The mission plays a crucial role in patrolling the areas near the front lines along the Armenian-Azerbaijani state borders. Canada will now be a country receiving regular updates about the situation on the ground. Hopefully, Canada can build on its participation by supporting efforts to secure Azerbaijan's co-operation with the mission. Such co-operation is necessary to stabilize the situation on the ground, and also to promote co-operation over shared resources that do not adhere to border lines.

• (1225)

Azerbaijan's decision to co-operate with the mission could also serve as a significant statement of its readiness to avoid any tensions with Armenia.

I will be happy to discuss these ideas in the question-and-answer session.

Thanks again for having me for your session.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We now go to members for questions.

Given the limited time available and the reality that we're hearing from four witnesses, I would ask all members to be mindful of the time slots and the limited time we have available.

First we go to MP Hoback. You have five minutes.

Mr. Randy Hoback (Prince Albert, CPC): Thank you, Chair.

Thank you, witnesses, for being here this morning.

In a lot of the presentations, you've talked about trust and rebuilding trust. Maybe I'll start with the last witness.

You talked about the need to rebuild trust. What types of actions could be taken to rebuild that trust? What could that look like?

Ms. Olesya Vartanyan: In fact, during my presentation, I gave you a number of such measures.

I would definitely start with facilitating the visits of the people to Nagorno-Karabakh so they are able to visit their homes and the graveyards.

In addition to that, quite a lot of people want to go back to collect their documents and some other belongings. This is definitely not an eventual return to Nagorno-Karabakh, but it is something where-by you could see co-operation taking place between the local Armenians and the Azerbaijani authorities through international mediation.

The other very important confidence-building measure would certainly be Azerbaijan starting to co-operate with the EU mission—

The Chair: Ms. Vartanyan, we're having a hard time with interpretation. Could you give us a couple of seconds, please?

Ms. Vartanyan, we're hearing from the interpreters that they're having a very hard time hearing you. I think there are some connectivity issues in Armenia, where you currently are. You can remain with us, but I'm afraid members can't pose any questions to you.

In all fairness, given the question that was asked, if you would like to send us a written response, we obviously would be happy to take it into consideration.

Thank you. I'm terribly sorry for the technical difficulties.

Mr. Hoback, you still have four minutes.

Mr. Randy Hoback: Mr. Sahadeo, you talked about gas supplies and the fact of supplying gas to the EU.

How do you trust the EU's judgment in regard to this issue now, in light of the fact that they're relying on gas supplies from the area? Do you see them being an honest broker at this time?

Mr. Jeff Sahadeo: I think it's very difficult. It's not just the gas supplies, although that's the primary economic motivator.

Azerbaijan has done a very strong job in lobbying European capitals, so you have pro-Azerbaijani members of parliament or members of government in, for example, France, which has the strongest pro-Armenian slant, and in eastern Europe as well.

It's very difficult to see the EU coming to any kind of collective conclusion. Anything like sanctions or efforts on gas supply would probably be imposed nationally. This is why I mentioned in my remarks that I don't see the European Union as an actor that can do more than try to bring these groups to the table.

Mr. Randy Hoback: If Canada was sitting here with LNG on the shoreline ready to supply those needs, would it give the EU more breathing room, for lack of a better word, to actually be more neutral in this case?

Mr. Jeff Sahadeo: Azerbaijan supplies about 3.5% of the European Union's gas; it's not a huge amount. It's mainly to some of these eastern European states, like Bulgaria and Romania and places like that. Canada could act as an alternative supplier, certainly.

• (1230)

Mr. Randy Hoback: We've heard calls for sanctions to be brought forward, yet when we look at Armenia and at trade in the region, Canada doesn't do a lot of volume of trade with either country. How effective would those sanctions actually be, other than symbolically?

Mr. Jeff Sahadeo: Yes, as I think the ambassador mentioned, those sanctions will have as great a chance to backfire as they would to actually do anything, because they might embolden the Azerbaijani government to ramp up its rhetoric against Canada.

We could impose sanctions on individuals, perhaps, but they're not coming to Canada anyway. Our volume of trade is very low. The only way a sanction regime would work would be if it was with the United States and the European Union, but we don't see any evidence of that so far.

Canadian sanctions might give a positive signal to the Armenian community here, but in terms of regional politics, I don't see them doing much.

Mr. Randy Hoback: Mr. Waters, you talked about the fact that you would like to see sanctions brought forward, just because of the symbolic side of it. Do you believe that to be true? How would you see sanctions having an effect in the region?

Dr. Christopher Waters: I just want to clarify that Canadian parliamentarians, if calling for sanctions, would not be alone. The ambassador referred to "like-minded allies". I want to suggest to you that the like-minded allies are parliamentarians around the world. I would refer you, for example, to the European Parliament's motion earlier this month, which passed with 491 votes in favour and nine against, calling for sanctions. Now, that's the European Parliament, not the executive of the European Union, but to be clear, there are calls for sanctions outside Canada amongst parliamentarians, including within Congress.

I would also suggest that the sanctions would have more than a symbolic effect. They would have a potentially galvanizing effect, but most importantly, they would suggest to the Aliyev regime that they cannot simply be emboldened to continue breaching international law and international agreements, as they will.

Thank you.

Mr. Randy Hoback: Mr. Ratelle, you talked about war crimes in the historic sites, the heritage sites. How do you see Canada's role in regard to documenting possible war crimes and then seeing possible justice in those war crimes brought forward?

Dr. Jean-François Ratelle: I think Canada has a huge role to play in the idea of universal jurisdiction with regard to war crimes, crimes against humanity, and potentially crimes of genocide by documenting crimes and being an acting partner within the International Criminal Court.

As I mentioned, if Armenia finally ratified their own statute, there will be room under the ICC to bring forward a case for Nagorno-Karabakh to the ICC with a referral from Canada. I think Canada has many roles that can be played at several levels.

I can add also that if any individual responsible for this potential ethnic cleansing travelled to Canada, there could be also prosecution for crimes against humanity within Canada.

Mr. Randy Hoback: I just have a little bit of time. Do you see the Canadian government actually doing that?

The Chair: No, I'm afraid you're out of time, Mr. Hoback.

Mr. Randy Hoback: Do you actually see the Canadian government doing that?

The Chair: Mr. Hoback, I'm afraid you're out of time. Thank you, Mr. Ratelle.

We have MP Alghabra for five minutes, please.

Hon. Omar Alghabra (Mississauga Centre, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair. I want to thank the witnesses for being here today, and those of you who are online.

For the benefit of the committee, I'd like your insight on what our allies are doing in response, namely the U.S. and Europeans. Can you share with the committee some of the reactions and some of the plans that the U.S. or the Europeans are discussing in reaction to what has happened?

I'm directing it to all four of you. Those of you who may have more information, please contribute to the question.

Dr. Jean-François Ratelle: In a nutshell, I think for the moment we have to be honest that many of the western partners are not doing as much as they should with regard to applying international law and reacting to the violation of international law, as well as imposing sanctions or even providing safety and security measures for the local Nagorno-Karabakh population as well as Armenia, in the southern situation that we were all discussing before.

Mr. Jeff Sahadeo: Yes, I would agree. You haven't seen anything beyond blanket condemnations, but there are no targeted actions, with the exception of France, which has offered to sell arms to Armenia, but even then it has not imposed sanctions.

I do think there is a realization of the potential ethnic cleansing—again, that is a definitional term. Not only has Azerbaijan chased out over 100,000 Armenians and made it almost impossible for them to return, but it also has territorial ambitions. This is why I think we have to look at Turkey or Iran. Unfortunately, these are the countries that have an interest in dealing with things. I don't think our western partners right now have an interest themselves in

doing much, but we can work with these countries, as difficult as it may be to try to come up with a peaceful solution for the region.

• (1235)

Hon. Omar Alghabra: Mr. Waters, I'll come to you by adding to that question. Why do you think that is? Why do you think the response from the U.S. and the EU as governments has not been as strong as some of you experts here are advocating it should be?

Dr. Christopher Waters: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

First of all, I think it is important to point out that France has taken robust measures, albeit not sanctions, and not only in terms of arms sales. For example, France has dispatched a military attaché to its embassy in Yerevan, stepping up defence co-operation in some significant ways.

I mentioned, on the European Union side, that the Parliament has overwhelmingly endorsed a call for sanctions. That hasn't filtered down to the executive level, although there has been condemnation at the executive level. The President of the European Council, the President of France and Chancellor of Germany, in a joint statement, have all indicated unwavering support for the independent sovereignty and territorial integrity of Armenia. That hasn't translated into sanctions yet, and in large measure that's because the European Union views Azerbaijan as a reliable source of gas.

However, Canada doesn't have to rely on Azerbaijan, and that's why I think Canada could play a leadership role here, galvanizing support as well among other parliamentarians around the world, including the at least 100 members of Congress who have also called for sanctions.

Hon. Omar Alghabra: Mr. Waters, can you help us understand why you think the Europeans or the U.S., as governments, are not acting as many of the advocates have been asking for?

Dr. Christopher Waters: In the European Union's case, it's because Azerbaijan is seen as a reliable alternative for gas.

To be honest, I am not naive to the geopolitical realities with respect to the politics of not only Turkey but also Iran being major players in the region, and whose co-operation will ultimately be needed to have a sustained peace. I very much get the geopolitics of it. I nonetheless think that this is a chance for Canada to offer moral leadership, and that would be leadership in conjunction with fellow parliamentarians around the world.

To be clear, when I say “targeted sanctions”, Canada is not in a position to make a serious economic dent in Azerbaijan's GDP. For example, the Canadian Space Agency decided this year not to participate in the 2023 International Astronautical Congress in Azerbaijan, citing concerns over the humanitarian crisis. These kinds of things are symbolic, but they send a signal to Baku and to our allies that there will be consequences for breaching international law.

The Chair: Thank you.

We will next go to MP Bergeron. You have five minutes, sir.

[Translation]

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron: Thank you, Chair.

I believe Ms. Vartanyan has her hand raised. I don't know how you're going to handle that, Mr. Chair.

My question is for Mr. Waters and Mr. Sahadeo, but I invite Ms. Vartanyan to respond in writing and Mr. Ratelle to add comments.

It's important to understand how isolated Armenia is right now. On one hand, it was abandoned by its Russian ally and, on the other, it was met with indifference from the international community, most notably Western countries, for a host of reasons. We watched passively as the Lachine corridor was closed and its population literally starved. We passively witnessed Azerbaijani incursions into Armenian territory. We passively witnessed the invasion of Nagorno-Karabakh and the flight of over 100,000 people. As has been said, one of the reasons for this was Azerbaijan's strategic importance, given the European Union's oil supply difficulties. The fact that there is a security agreement with Russia is even cited as a reason for not wanting to go further in supporting Armenia. Armenia is therefore in the worst situation of all, since it can't count on anyone's support except France's.

Is such an attitude on the part of the international community, and more particularly on the part of Western countries, in line with the message sent out by Presidents Biden and Zelensky at the last UN General Assembly, i.e., if we let this kind of thing happen, there will be further occurrences?

• (1240)

[English]

Dr. Christopher Waters: Mr. Chair, I think the member is right to point out....

I beg your pardon. Is this addressed to me, Mr. Chair?

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron: Go on, Mr. Waters. Then we'll go to Mr. Sahadeo.

[Translation]

Dr. Christopher Waters: Thank you.

[English]

I think that's right: Armenia is in a tough geopolitical situation. Frankly, it has been for the entirety of its history, certainly in the 19th and 20th centuries. There's nothing new about that.

In fairness, Canada has stepped up in some really important ways. I think we simply need to take this to the next level and continue to exercise moral leadership here—again, with our like-minded allies—but I would suggest again that for a committee of parliamentarians, our like-mindeds include those in the European Parliament and in Congress in calling for our executives to do the right thing and to take some bold actions.

I think there is a degree of inconsistency. The geopolitics, of course, matter, but I think it's a case of acting now to help ensure a tangible and lasting peace. For example, there is a proposal for a “Crossroads of Peace” initiative, which would unblock regional transportation links in the region. By all means, we should be sup-

porting that, and so should our allies, but unless we're willing to say that at some point that there will be a tangible response to territorial incursions or breaches of international law, any peace agreement that's concluded won't be worth the paper it's written on.

Thank you.

[Translation]

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron: What do you think, Mr. Sahadeo?

[English]

Mr. Jeff Sahadeo: I'd agree with Mr. Waters, and I'd agree with your question that without a strong response, I think we see Azerbaijan easily grasping the idea that they could take the southern parts of Armenia. I don't think Azerbaijan would do so alone. This is why I mentioned Turkey in my remarks. The Azerbaijani military is stronger than Armenia's, but it's not especially strong.

I don't think they would take that route, so there is a role now for strong international action. You could see a scenario in which you could strengthen the European Union presence on the ground if the western countries had the will to do so. They don't right now. To be frank, their interests are diverted to the situation in the Middle East.

We can see perhaps a role for Canadian leadership, but I don't see dragging other countries along to the point where we could actually make a difference on the ground militarily. Working with these countries—like Turkey especially, a NATO ally—would probably be the best way to do it, to try to form this plan that Mr. Waters just talked about, this Crossroads of Peace plan, so that we can unblock regional corridors and maybe even give some kind of corridor that allows Turkey and Azerbaijan to claim some kind of control over a very small section of it. Of course, that would not do [Inaudible—Editor]

The Chair: Thank you, Professor Sahadeo. Thank you very much.

Mr. Jeff Sahadeo: [Inaudible—Editor] in a way that it's an Armenian ally, so there is a role—

The Chair: Professor Sahadeo, I'm sorry. We're out of time for this question.

We next go to MP McPherson. You have five minutes.

Ms. Heather McPherson: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Ms. Vartanyan, I'm so sorry that you're not able to speak at the meeting. This is very disappointing. You're one of the witnesses we had most wanted to hear from, of course, so I am going to ask a couple of questions. I know you can't respond, but if you'd be so kind as to provide any of your insight in writing to the committee so that it could be included in our report, that would be very helpful.

First of all, I'd like to ask about how international organizations like the UN Refugee Agency and the ICRC are supporting those who have fled. I'd like to get a bit more insight into the current humanitarian conditions in the territory. If you could provide some writing on that, that would be fantastic.

For the other witnesses we have today, I was very interested in what Mr. Ratelle mentioned with regard to the ICC. I would be interested in getting a bit of understanding, so I'm going to put this question to all witnesses.

Perhaps I could start with you, Mr. Ratelle, and then go on to the next ones. Could you walk us through some of the different legal options and possibilities and what Canada should be pushing for or supporting in terms of justice for ethnic Armenians? We did talk about the ICC, but are there other options that we could be pursuing separately or in conjunction with the ICC and pushing for ICC justice?

Mr. Ratelle, can I start with you, please?

• (1245)

Dr. Jean-François Ratelle: Yes, thank you very much.

I think that for the moment, the ICC represents probably the best legal mechanism on the table. Obviously, Armenia has not ratified, for the moment, the Rome Statute. However, at the moment when Armenia would ratify the Rome Statute, the condition in which the refugees are living in Armenia could be considered, in a way, another crime against humanity linked to the potential ethnic cleansing.

We have seen such a strategy used by the ICC with regard to ethnic cleansing and, potentially, genocide in Myanmar. Myanmar did not ratify its own statute, but Bangladesh did, so living conditions of refugees living in Bangladesh—Rohingya refugees and others who were displaced—could be assimilated to a crime against humanity committed by the Myanmar government.

With such a strategy, it would be possible for Canada to refer the case to the ICC the moment the Rome Statute is ratified, and we can add that in the case of a war of aggression, although it would be difficult to refer the case because Azerbaijan did not ratify the Rome Statute. There could be at least legal measures connected to the International Court of Justice, as well as potentially an ad hoc tribunal that could be created by the Security Council or by other legal assemblies in Europe or in Canada or with regard to the General Assembly of the UN.

Ms. Heather McPherson: I'm not an expert, but just really quickly.... I understand that Russia and Ukraine have also not signed on to the Rome Statute, yet the Canadian government is pushing for that mechanism to be used in that situation. One would think that this would work.

Mr. Waters, do you have anything you could add to that?

Dr. Christopher Waters: I think I agree that the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court is the way to proceed, and I commend the Armenian authorities for indicating their willingness to join the Rome Statute. That's a really positive move, and Armenia will be one of the few countries in the former Soviet space that will be party to the Rome Statute of the International Criminal

Court. That's actually pretty exciting, and it's an important step that Armenia has indicated it will be taking.

The other thing I would say is that Azerbaijan has indicated, at least on one occasion, that it would investigate a suspected war crime. Let's not be naive. The chances of the Aliyev regime successfully investigating, let alone prosecuting, its own crime are remote. Nonetheless, the international community should set that as an expectation for Azerbaijan: that it does investigate credible allegations of war crimes, including the fact that many Armenians will claim that prisoners of war from Armenia remain in Azeri hands.

There are ongoing potential international humanitarian violations that should be responded to by Azerbaijan, as well as by potential international justice mechanisms.

Ms. Heather McPherson: Thank you.

Mr. Chair, do I have time to ask Mr. Sahadeo as well?

The Chair: You have 10 seconds.

Ms. Heather McPherson: I'm sorry, Mr. Sahadeo. If you have a brief intervention....

Mr. Jeff Sahadeo: I would agree with that. I think the greatest scale of violations took place in the 2020 war, so the ICC would be a place to bring that forward.

• (1250)

The Chair: Thank you.

We'll now go to the second round, which will provide three minutes each.

We'll start off with MP Epp.

Mr. Dave Epp (Chatham-Kent—Leamington, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you to all the witnesses for their excellent testimony.

When I listen, the question I ask myself is this: What are the elements that are needed for lasting peace? Obviously, the international community calls for negotiations at the peace table, but the events of September have to be placed in the context of at least the last 30 years—back to the fall of the Soviet Union—and also, as one of the witnesses mentioned, two centuries of ethnic conflict.

The territorial control back-and-forth seems to be very clearly a result of the relative strengths of the two parties, Azerbaijan and Armenia, within the context of their international allies or opponents.

I'll start my questions with Mr. Waters.

You talked about this being the time for Canada to impose sanctions to set an example for our “like-minded”. What is the forum for the like-minded to come together to put together those lasting elements for peace? Obviously, the international community can't impose peace. The two parties have to be there. However, unless the international community seems to be aligned, peace seems to be very elusive. What's the forum that includes Russia, Iran and Turkey, as well as the EU and the U.S.?

Dr. Christopher Waters: The Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe—the OSCE—through its Minsk Group at one point potentially played a positive role here. Unfortunately, it no longer does.

There is a role for Canada with like-minded allies to act on the stage of the south Caucasus. That includes Canada's participation in the EU monitoring mission, which I commend. Canada also has strong and formal relations with the Council of Europe and the European Union, and of course we have our most important ally to the south. It's slightly to the north, here in Windsor, but I think my point is clear.

I think there are international fora. With Turkey being a NATO ally, it becomes much more difficult to have a dialogue with Iran. I think Iran is an important regional player that at some point has to at least be reckoned with in this regard. It's not easy. There's no obvious international forum for doing so.

Mr. Chair, if I could, I confused—

Mr. Dave Epp: I'm going to follow up with a question and then allow you to continue, Mr. Waters.

I'm sorry. Continue. It just fell out of my head.

Dr. Christopher Waters: I apologize. I kept talking. It's an occupational hazard.

The Chair: Mr. Epp, you have 20 seconds.

Mr. Dave Epp: I understand Ambassador Rae's comment that this has been a “failure of global diplomacy”. How great is the risk of a following failure if we don't get our global act together, particularly with the southern corridor over to Nakhchivan?

The Chair: You have no more than 20 seconds for the response, please.

Dr. Christopher Waters: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I think there is a real risk. The Aliyev regime has said that one way or another, Azerbaijan will have control there. I think there's a real risk, and there could be a risk of contagion.

Mr. Chair, I did a quick check. Armenia—I believe it was earlier this month—ratified the International Criminal Court statute. I think that's worth checking by the clerk of the committee, so that there can be clarity around that. I didn't want to do too much of an investigation online, but I think Armenia actually ratified it.

The Chair: Thank you, Professor Waters.

We next go to MP Chatel. You have three minutes.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Sophie Chatel (Pontiac, Lib.): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

I have a question for the three professors here today.

What position do these two key players, Russia and Turkey, take on the exodus of 100,000 Armenian civilians?

Next, how can those two powers consider resolving the conflict after the September 19th aggression? What is the geopolitical situation, given these two major players?

Mr. Ratelle can answer first, then it will be Mr. Sahadeo's and Mr. Waters' turn.

Dr. Jean-François Ratelle: When it comes to Russia, it had the potential to stop ethnic cleansing with its peace mission. Yet it chose not to fulfill its mission on the ground. Russia seems to be moving further and further away from its role in the South Caucasus, which really creates an opportunity for Canada to play a more active role and exercise greater leadership in the region.

Turkey, for its part, offers Azerbaijan direct support through military and economic means. In fact, it is significantly more supportive of the idea of a greater Azerbaijan than it is of a return of the Armenian population to Nagorno-Karabakh.

• (1255)

[*English*]

Mr. Jeff Sahadeo: Russia's interests have definitely lessened. When Pashinyan came into power in 2019 and opened a pro-western orientation, Russia was hostile to that. That could have been one reason that it decided to back away from Nagorno-Karabakh in 2020 and 2022. Of course, there are the challenges with Ukraine.

Russia's kept its hands in. It's condemned Armenia for joining the ICC. Armenia is trapped now. Iran is probably the closest geopolitical ally in the region.

Russia could be rather dangerous. It's turning its attention to Georgia right now. There's not as much of a void as we think. The Russians are still there, ready to act, but they are diverted at the moment. This is why Turkey's actions.... We think Turkey wouldn't have operated this way in supporting Azerbaijan had Russia objected more formally as Armenia's ally and as a member of the Eurasian Economic Union and the Collective Security Treaty Organization.

Going back to the previous question on the Zangezur corridor, Turkey is seized with linking the Black Sea and the Caspian Sea to be able to move through the Eurasian corridor. They're not going to let that opportunity pass. This is a critical point when we have to try to figure out how we can work this peacefully.

Pashinyan's trying to do that right now. That's his whole peace plan: to open these transport corridors under the sovereign control of these countries, but with the understanding that they're open. Can we get the Turks to buy into that? Can we convince the Azerbaijanis to do it? I think that's the moment that we're facing now.

The Chair: You're out of time, MP Chatel. My apologies.

We next go to MP Bergeron. You have a minute and a half.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron: I'll be brief.

Here is my first question: in your opinion, why didn't Georgia take part in the peace talks?

My second question concerns borders, which are being discussed at great length. I had the opportunity to speak with European observers, who told us that the border was not well defined in several cases, but that in some cases it was well defined and Azerbaijani troops were indeed on the Armenian side. What do you say?

[*English*]

Mr. Jeff Sahadeo: I could talk about Georgia for hours, but I have one minute.

Georgia's government right now is approaching a more Russian orientation. They also rely upon Azerbaijan for gas supplies. After the 2008 war, they switched a lot of their energy supplies to Azerbaijan, but they try to keep good relations with both countries. I think their play now is to stay out of it. They have bigger domestic problems, including the hundreds of thousands of Russians who are in Georgia right now.

I'm sorry; what was the second part of your question?

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron: It was about the frontier.

Mr. Jeff Sahadeo: The frontier line right now is imaginary. It depends on what these countries say it's going to be, so we do see Azerbaijan basically not being willing to enter into peace talks with a precondition that they accept the frontiers of Armenia.

The Chair: You have 15 seconds, please.

[*Translation*]

Dr. Jean-François Ratelle: There's no doubt that Georgia, between Russia and Azerbaijan, is in an uncomfortable geopolitical position. It's in areas where the border is more poorly defined that it would be transgressed, it seems. That is what creates this problematic situation where we can't point to an outright violation of international law.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you.

For the final minute and a half, we go to MP McPherson.

Ms. Heather McPherson: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

A minute and a half is a very short time, so I'm just going to quickly ask the three witnesses we have with us this question: What are your top two recommendations for actions Canada should take right now?

Mr. Sahadeo, I'll start with you, since I was so tight on time last time.

Mr. Jeff Sahadeo: They are to try to open a channel with Turkey to start peaceful negotiations through them, and then to use our embassy in Yerevan to try to build democracy and humanitarian aid in Armenia.

Ms. Heather McPherson: Thank you.

Go ahead, Mr. Waters.

Dr. Christopher Waters: My top two recommendations are targeted sanctions and fulfilling the recommendations of the Dion report.

Ms. Heather McPherson: Go ahead, Mr. Ratelle.

Dr. Jean-François Ratelle: As much as possible, from a legal aspect, support the international process to make sure that Canada is a leader with regard to international law, and don't apply international law on a part-time basis compared to Ukraine, Gaza and what we're seeing in Nagorno-Karabakh.

• (1300)

Ms. Heather McPherson: That is an excellent place to start.

Madam Vartanyan, could you submit that answer in writing? Again, I'm so sorry that you weren't able to speak in person.

The Chair: Thank you, MP McPherson.

At this point, I'd like to take the opportunity...

Hon. Michael Chong: I have a point of order when you're done, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Sure, so I just....

Go ahead, Mr. Bergeron.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron: I have two things to say, Mr. Chair.

First of all, I just want to point out again that Ms. Vartanyan has her hand raised. I don't know if she wishes to speak and whether you want to give her the floor.

Secondly, I wondered if it would be possible to make it clear to the witnesses that they are always welcome to send us supplementary answers in writing, if indeed they have not had the opportunity to answer any of the questions put to them.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

[English]

The Chair: For sure, so allow me to start off by thanking Professor Ratelle, Professor Sahadeo, Professor Waters and Ms. Vartanyan. Again, we apologize for the technical complications, Ms. Vartanyan. Obviously, for any of the questions that were raised by the members, should you wish to send us a written response, we would be very grateful. That also extends to all of you. If there is more you would like us to consider, please do feel free to send us more information. Thank you very much for your expertise and your perspectives on this important matter.

It now being a few minutes after one o'clock....

Go ahead, Mr. Chong.

Hon. Michael Chong: Mr. Chair, since we're not getting a lot of advance notice about our upcoming meetings, I'd like you to tell us what the Notice of Meeting will say for this coming Wednesday's meeting on November 1, as well as what is planned for the Notices of Meeting for next Monday, November 6, and next Wednesday, November 8.

The Chair: Yes.

For the benefit of all members, we will be resuming our study on food and fuel this Wednesday.

On the following Monday, for the first hour, we will finally be hearing from our ambassador in Ukraine. For the second hour, we will resume the food and fuel study.

The two hours on Wednesday are dedicated to food and fuel. The reason, as you will all recall, is that when we had our first session on food and fuel, we only managed to hear from two witnesses. You have all gone through the trouble of providing 49 witnesses, I believe. We want to make sure that, to the best of our ability, we get around to hearing from more of the individuals you submitted.

Hon. Michael Chong: Very quickly, Mr. Chair, is it possible to get notices of meeting more than 18 hours ahead of time, so that we can prepare for these meetings?

The Chair: Sure.

Hon. Michael Chong: I would prefer to have them at least 72 hours ahead of time so that we can prepare for these meetings and for the witnesses.

The Chair: That's fair enough. Absolutely.

I will add that we had agreed in a preliminary way to set a deadline of today for witnesses for the Israel-Gaza study. We had not specified whether that's by end of day or earlier. Now that we have more time, and until further notice, should you think of more witnesses, please don't hesitate to add them to your individual list. At some point, we'll agree on a deadline for the submission of witnesses.

Thank you very much.

This meeting is adjourned.

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